

To make matters worse, of course, the House Republicans are refusing to take steps to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, like closing the gun show loophole. Indeed, they want to weaken the existing laws with a pawnshop loophole. To keep the crime rate falling, we need more police on the street and fewer guns in the hands of criminals, not the reverse.

We have a rare and fleeting chance to use the fruits of our prosperity today to build America for tomorrow. We can invest now to save Social Security and modernize Medicare for the 21st century with more prevention for cancer, osteoporosis, and other conditions and with that prescription drug benefit; to lift our children by improving their education; to pay off the national debt for the first time since 1835 and give a generation lower interest rates for businesses, for home mortgages, for car, credit card, and college loan payments—that means more jobs and higher incomes; to bring economic opportunity through investment to our poorest areas that are left behind; to have an affordable tax cut for child care, long-term care, retirement savings, and other things Americans need; and to give our families the securities they deserve by keeping the crime rate coming down.

We can do all these things and have an affordable tax cut, or we can squander our hard-won progress on short-term thinking.

Just remember a few years ago—many people never thought we could balance the budget, but we did, and now we actually have a chance to pay off the national debt. Many never thought we could bring down crime rates, but we did, dramatically. Now we have a chance to achieve something that not too long ago would have seemed pure fantasy. In the early years of the new century, we can make America the safest big nation on Earth. We can do this, but only if we act now in the long-term interest of our Nation.

So, again, I call on the Congress and all Americans to make this a season of progress. Let's keep thinking about tomorrow.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:32 p.m. on July 23 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on July 24. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 23 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Picnic in Aspen, Colorado July 24, 1999

Thank you very much. Thank you. First of all, let me say that the setting is too gorgeous and the day is too beautiful really to have a political speech. [*Applause*] I was hoping no one would clap when I said that, but anyway—[*laughter*]. And so I will be brief. But I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank all the people involved with the Democratic Party and all of those who were hosting events or doing things for us who had to go through this mad scramble of change in our schedule because of the death of King Hassan and the absolute conviction that Hillary and I have that we should go to Morocco to the funeral service.

He was a great friend of the peace process. And after—Hillary went over there and went to see him. He stood with us in human rights battles; he's done a lot of things that were very, very good for the United States and for the

world. And so—and he was our friend. So we're going to go.

But I thank all of you for changing your schedules, and I thank you for your support. I want to thank our good friends, Dianne and Dick, for having us at their humble little place here. [*Laughter*] This is a gorgeous, serene, wonderful setting, and I thank them. I want to thank Congresswoman Diana DeGette. And I know that Maggie Fox is here, Congressman Udall's wife. I thank her for being here. I thank all the officials of the Colorado Democratic Party and the people from here in Aspen who met me last night. When did I get in, 12:30, quarter to one, some ridiculous hour? And 12 people came out, we had a little 30-minute discussion last night about the state of the world. It was quite wonderful.

I wanted to make a few points as briefly as I can. Governor Romer made many of them, and Hillary referenced the work that he and Bea and she and I did for many years when we were Governors together. First of all, this is a very different country than it was in January of 1993. A lot of people have forgotten that. This is a different country than it was in January of '93.

And it changed because we had a different set of ideas and we implemented them and they worked. And I won't bore you with all the details, but I think it's very important. And it's very important as we let the next year and a half unfold, what happens in our country, what happens in our politics system.

You know, I hear some of the people who oppose us now basically, after telling everybody for 6½ years what a bad guy I was; they're now basically saying, "Oh well, Bill Clinton is like Michael Jordan; he just jumps higher than the other guys; now the Democrats—he's gone, so we'll put them in the cellar again." There's a sort of cynical political theme.

Let me tell you something. I could not have done anything—anything in the last 6 years if our ideas hadn't been right, and if I hadn't had the help of Al Gore and Hillary and Dianne Feinstein and every Member of Congress and all the people in our administration and team who did that—and all of you who helped us throughout all these long years in the good and the bad times.

Politics is about values and ideas and actions and whether they change people's lives or not. So the first thing I just want to say to all of you who have been with us all the time, you ought to feel pretty good out here—not just because this is a beautiful day and a beautiful place, but this is a different country than it was.

The second thing I want to say is we have to decide two things in the next year and a half. We have to decide what are we going to do right now with our prosperity, with our surplus, and what decisions will we make in the next election cycle about where we go.

I had a very interesting question in the press conference earlier this week. Susan Page said, "Well, Mr. President, your approval ratings are back up after Kosovo and you won the war, and it's very strong approval ratings, but this question was asked our voters: 'Do you want to vote for someone who will just continue the

President's policies, or someone who will change policies?' And someone who will change policies won 50 to 38."

And I said, "Well Susan, if they polled me, I'd have been in the 50 percent, too, because our country is about continuous renewal." And I had to spend the last 6 years trying to make sure this country could work again. Now that things are working well, the question is what kind of change are we going to have—not whether we'll change—are we going to build on what we've done and go beyond it, or are we going to go back to things that didn't work before in the blind hope that they will?

And I'll just give you a couple of examples. First of all, in the moment. The big debate in Washington is, what do we do with the surplus. Well, let me say this. We produced a balanced budget in 1997 by cutting spending rigorously and saying we would keep these caps in place by 5 years, and by continuing to grow the economy by getting interest rates down and investment up. Now, so we now have this projected surplus. But you should also know that we have an enormous number of teaching hospitals in cities throughout America, for example, saying we need to put more money in the Medicare program to take care of the health care systems in the country.

I believe that we should be investing more, not less, in education, the environment, and biomedical research. I don't think we should cut back. And perhaps most important, I think this gives us a chance to meet the challenge of the aging of America and the challenge of giving this country a long-term pattern for growth. And let me just address those briefly.

The number of people over 65 is going to double in the next 30 years. There are going to be fewer people working and more people retired. Social Security is going to run out of money in 2034; Medicare is going to run out of money in 2015. I think we ought to set aside most of the surplus to save Social Security; to save and modernize Medicare; to add more preventive tests for osteoporosis and cancer and other things to try to keep people out of the hospital in the first place; to add a prescription drug benefit that is modest but will be very helpful to 75 percent of the people who are over 65 who don't have adequate drug coverage; and to do it in a way that would allow us to become, for the first time since—listen to this—1835, debt-free.

Now, why should the liberal party, the more liberal party, be for making America debt-free? Because in 1999 and in 2000 and from now on, in a global economy, when money travels across national borders at the speed of light, interest rates are set in a global environment. And if a wealthy country is out of debt, it means that the people who live in that wealthy country can borrow money at lower cost, which means there will be more investment, more jobs, higher wages, lower car payments, lower credit card payments, lower home mortgage payments, lower college loan payments, and higher economic growth over a longer period of time.

It also means that when a global economy gets in trouble, as Asia got in trouble, Russia got in trouble, and our friends and trading partners and people we hope will remain democracies need money, they can get the money they need at lower cost because we won't be out there taking it away from them. And I think it is an unbelievable opportunity, and we can do it.

The point I want to make to you is, the Republicans are trying to cast the debate in Washington today as "our tax cut is bigger than your tax cut." It's almost like the arguments we used to have when I was in school—[laughter]—"our tax cut is bigger than your tax cut." Well, if that's the choice, you know, that's a pretty hard deal to argue with. The question is, if you take our tax cut, which is smaller than theirs, you get to save Social Security and Medicare; you get to take the country out of debt; you get to continue to invest in education, environment, medical research.

If they get their budget through, we will do nothing to extend the life of Medicare, nothing to extend the life of Social Security. We will imperil the future stability of the country, therefore. We will pay down the debt, but we won't pay off. And we will actually have to have drastic cuts in the investments in education, in the environment, in medical research, and believe it or not, even in defense.

Now, that's what's going on here. And what I want to ask you is, after all—this debate couldn't even occur if we all had a clear memory of what this country was like in 1991 and 1992. The Democrats are being punished for our success.

Can you imagine—why is the first issue the size of the tax cut, before we really assess how much we have to give these hospitals to make

them whole? Did we cut them too much, and if we did, shouldn't we fix it? What does it take to fix Social Security and Medicare? What does it take to get us out of debt? What does it take to fulfill our basic responsibilities? Then why don't we talk about the tax cut?

In Washington, it's all backwards again. And one of the young men who works for me said, "Mr. President, this is like a family sitting down around a table and saying, 'Let's plan the vacation of our dreams to Hawaii, and when we get back we'll see if we can make the mortgage payments and send the kids to college.'" I mean, this is—it doesn't make sense.

So the Democratic Party again is telling the American people, remember what got us to where we are. Do we need change? Absolutely. And we have a plan—and I talked about it in my radio address today—to save Social Security and Medicare, to make the country debt-free, to continue to invest in education and the environment, to literally make this the safest big country in the world early in the next century. And none of it can be done if their idea prevails.

So I think we ought to have a big debate about it. And if we look to the future—I just want to echo one thing Roy said—I'm convinced the more I think about it and the longer I live, and I'm not running for anything anymore, that the biggest difference between the two parties today is the way we think of community. It's not whether some of us are warmhearted and others are coldblooded. It's not whether some of us are nice people and others aren't nice. It's whether we believe down deep inside that those of us who are pretty fortunate would be better off if everybody else did better and that we'll be not only sort of morally satisfied but actually better off if we try to go forward together in a country where there's opportunity for every responsible citizen and in which everybody has a place in our community.

And I'll just give you a few examples of that where their party genuinely disagrees with us, from top to bottom, from all the candidates to all the Congressmen. The Patients' Bill of Rights—I supported—unlike some people, I supported managed care, but only if the people didn't have to give up quality of care. I think it is unconscionable that a person in a managed care plan could have a doctor pleading for the person to go to see a specialist and some non-physician could block it for long enough to make the damage irrevocable.

I think it is unconscionable that in cities every day somebody gets hit by a car and has to go to an emergency room and has to drive by the nearest one to one, two, or three down the way because that's the one covered by the plan. I think it is wrong for a person working for a small business who has cancer and is in the middle of chemotherapy, or who is pregnant and having a difficult pregnancy, to have to change their doctor in the middle of the treatment because the employer has changed his coverage.

Why? It doesn't affect me. I'm the President; I have great health care. It doesn't affect you. Most of you have got—you can pay for whatever you need. So why are you here? Because we feel that our country is better if more people are healthy and if people are treated fairer.

I'll give you another example—it may not be popular in all parts of Colorado. I grew up in a State where half the people had a hunting or fishing license or both. But I think that we did the right thing to pass the Brady bill. I think we did the right thing to pass the assault weapon ban. And I think Dianne Feinstein did the right thing to pass the assault weapons ban and then keep trying to close all the loopholes in it.

Why is that? Because I think—not because I don't think people ought to be able to hunt or go to sporting events, but because I think that all of us ought to be willing to make reasonable compromises for the safety of the society as a whole, just like we do when we walk through an airport metal detector. You know, it didn't take too many planes to be hijacked before nobody screamed anymore when they walked through an airport metal detector, "You are interfering with my constitutional right to travel."

Now, think about it. This is crazy. So look at the fight in Washington. All of them, from the candidates to the Congress, were against closing the gun show loophole. We don't do background checks at gun shows and urban flea markets where a lot of criminals buy guns, and we have the technology to do it with very minor inconvenience. We think we should do it. And I think it is unconscionable that we would run the risk that one person would lose his or her life next year because we don't do that.

We're for the employment nondiscrimination act, and we're for hate crimes legislation. And we believe that it ought to specifically mention no discrimination against people because of sexual orientation. And we're not afraid of that.

Now, why is that? Because we think all law-abiding citizens ought to be part of America's community. Now, so I ask you, when you think about what we're doing in Washington now and the politics of the next year and a half, and if people ask you why you're here—in Colorado a lot of people would say you're nuts; they'd say, "Don't you understand," if you'd go to a Republican fundraiser, "that you'd get a great tax cut right now? Why are you here?"

Tell them because the country is better off, because we changed the direction of the country, and you want America to go forward into the new century together.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Dianne Feinstein's husband, Richard Blum, who cohosted the picnic; Representative Mark Udall's wife, Margaret L. Fox; former Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Democratic National Committee, and his wife, Bea; and USA Today journalist Susan Page.

Remarks on the Death of King Hassan II of Morocco and an Exchange With Reporters in Aspen

July 24, 1999

The President. Let me again offer my condolences to the family of His Majesty King Hassan of Morocco and to the people of Morocco. As all of you know, Hillary and I are going to the funeral. His Majesty was a friend of the

United States for a very long time and a friend of the Middle East peace process. He also worked very hard to reconcile the differences among the Moroccan people, within Morocco, and therefore, to set an example of the kind